

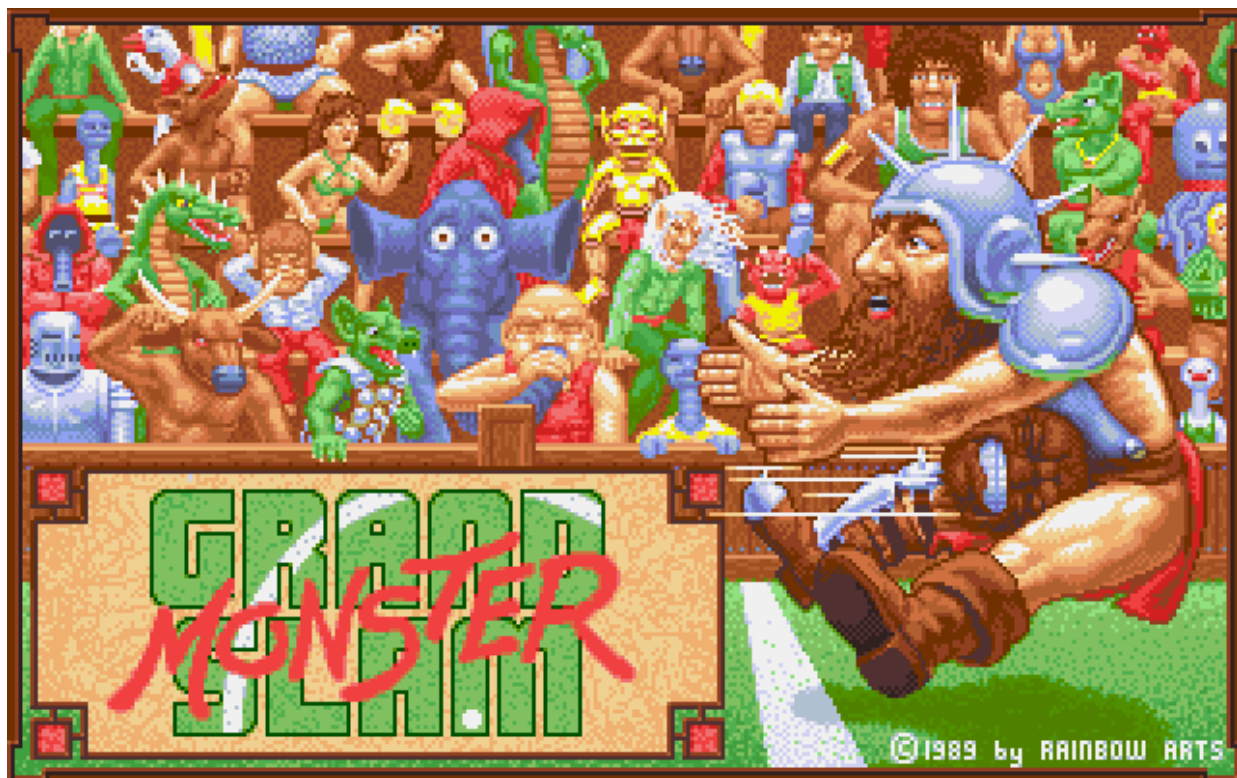
Slam plonk the Flonk!

Written by dreamkatcha. Any related videos, as always, can be found on my YouTube channel.

None of this would have been possible without the fantastic resources generously provided by immensely talented emulator authors, and communities such as Hall of Light, Lemon Amiga, Lemon 64, World of Spectrum, Moby Games, World of Longplays and Recorded Amiga Games. Thank you for your tireless dedication to preserving the history of gaming.

If a pleasant, sedate session of football, rugby or golf isn't your cup of tea, the Amiga is home to a number of *alternative* sports games. Almost exclusively these titles take a mainstream sport, beam it multiple decades into the future and lace it with bloodthirsty violence. Speedball and Smash T.V. are the obvious ones that first spring to mind, though there are plenty of other examples past and present to sink your gum-guarded teeth into. Unreal Tournament falls into this genre, and the classic arcade team brawler, Mutant Football League, was revamped as recently as 2017. It's a furtive battleground.

Other developers kept their eyes firmly on the ball, went off the wall, and yet swung in the polar opposite direction in terms of setting and era. Brutal Sports Football combined ancient Rome style gladiatorial bouts with American football. Then there's Grand Monster Slam which went all out medieval RPG in its theme, whilst actually dishing up a pick-up-and-play twitchy sports game of sorts.



In the manual - published by Rainbow Arts in 1989, the *game* too - the developers, Golden Goblins, explain the process behind its genesis and also some of the difficulties they faced coding it. Odd then that they failed to mention that it's a blatant facsimile of Penguin-Kun Wars from Japanese coin-op creators UPL, released in 1985.



What Golden Goblins brought to the banquet table was overhauled graphics inspired by the realm of Dungeons and Dragons et al, improved sound effects and music, and graciously intricate animation. Gameplay remains largely intact.

Hartwig Nieder Gassel devised a tome-like storyline and fantasy world setting that explains how we came to be mixed up in this oddball competitive romp. This may well be enthralling and well written in German. Translated to pidgin English, however, complete with dodgy spelling, grammar and quirky word choices, it's a real chore to plough through. I have to confess, I gave up a few paragraphs in.



Anyway, the gist is that every five years the various inhabitants of 'Ghold' (the world of six suns) come together to decide which is the supreme race, and should therefore be awarded a gold medal (and yellow t-shirt?) from the overlordy ruler type bloke.

According to Hartwig, Ghold was constructed along with a friend and brought to life through role-playing, guided by the rules of the D&D system. He hinted that were Golden Goblins to create a fantasy game in the future they would likely entrench it in the same locale. He *didn't* explain what was going on with all the wacky, random capitalisation of words. Desert of OhgruhN anyone? City of Hodh CrownguarD?



Incidentally, Golden Goblins only released one other game after *Monster Slam* and *Circus Attractions*; another combat sports title known as *M.U.D.S.: Mean Ugly Dirty Sport*. It was published in 1990. This time a team affair - also staged in the GhoulD universe - it's a cross between rugby and a night out in Moss Side armed with knuckle dusters. Stepping away from the sidelines you adopt the role of player-manager, orchestrating your five-man/monster/ghoul team to score goals by chucking vomited 'Flonk' creatures into buckets.



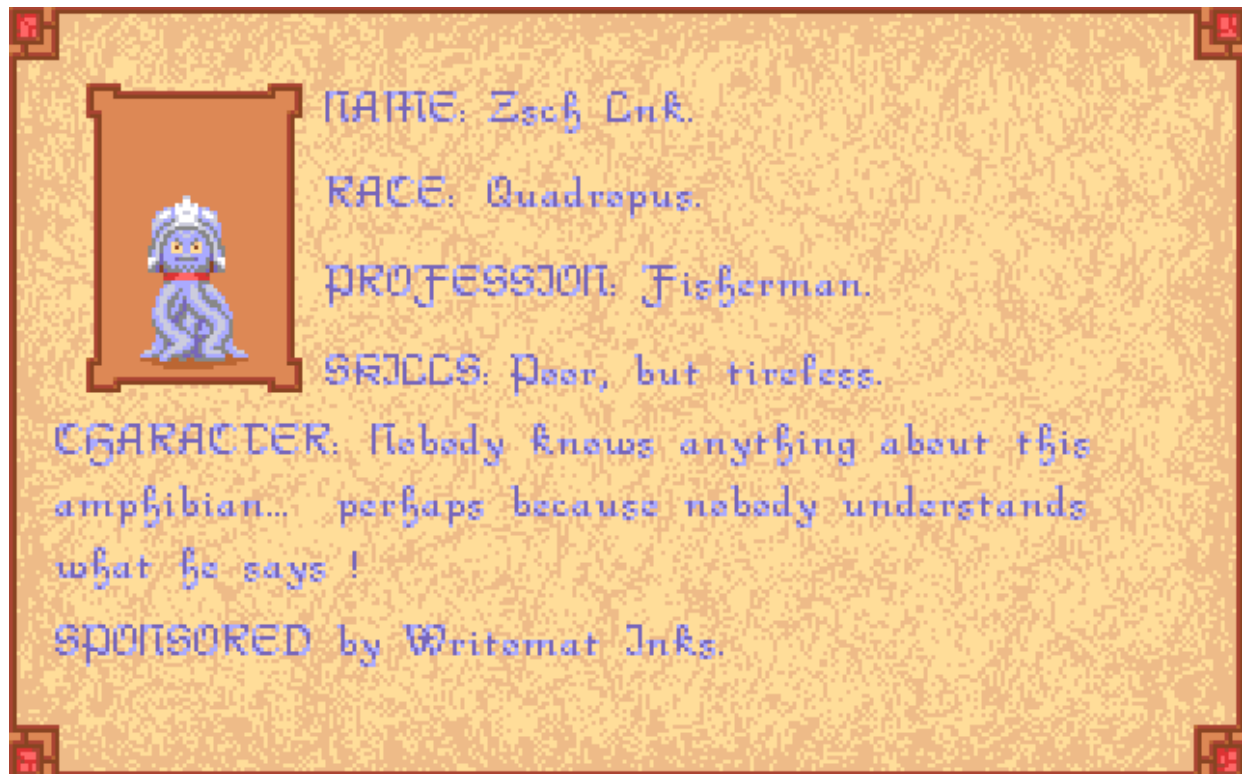
Sidelines or *sidetracked*? Maybe we should get back to the matter in hand.

For the purposes of continuity, we play a dwarf, and must pit our wits (and feet) against a supporting cast consisting of an ogre, octopus, minotaur, elf, barbarian, hyena man, an imp court jester, magician, dragon man blacksmith, orc warrior, golden goblin, and Amazon warrior... and a duck! I don't know why I'm singling out the duck for an exclamation mark when I've also mentioned the participation of an octopus in the same breath. This isn't quite Daley Thompson's Decathlon. Feel free to waggle your Zipstick all you like, but it won't achieve anything.



Despite the plethora of opponents on offer, you *always* play the dwarf... and to think body-swapping was *massive* in the eighties. Vice Versa, 18 Again, Big...

All characters are introduced via a biography card detailing their race, sponsor, place in society, special abilities and weaknesses. More than 'Top Trumps' window dressing, these actually make a difference to the way they approach the game. Some are more agile than others, while several deploy weapons such as a triplet of fireballs, or a cyclone conjured up and projected to the opposite end of the playfield.



Adversary's behaviour is modelled on the Hershenberg algorithm, "a model creating predictable, but not stereotype reactions" according to designer, Rolf Lakamper. Golden Goblins wanted to "provide the player's opponents in the Grand Monster Slam with personalities of their own" and "quickly agreed that a mere random-figure-algorithm or a control along tables wasn't worth it's salt."

Rolf went on to explain, "We had to give the monsters up to a certain degree a real artificial intelligence! Each opponent is classified by a set of reaction-parameters describing his or her physical and mental abilities".



Duking it out against opponents one at a time the objective is to rid your goal area of furry critters known as 'Beloms'. You do this by punting them across the field with a view to flooring your foe. The longer they're dazed the greater the opportunity to follow up with more volleys. Simultaneously *they* attempt to return the favour, forcing you to dodge as well as launch attacks.

If one of your shots goes astray into the crowd, a penalty (or pelvan) is awarded to the opposition. At this point, a duck (confusingly *also* known as a Pelvan) descends onto the pitch via a rope to serve as the ball to be hoofed up-field in the direction of your guarded 'goal'.

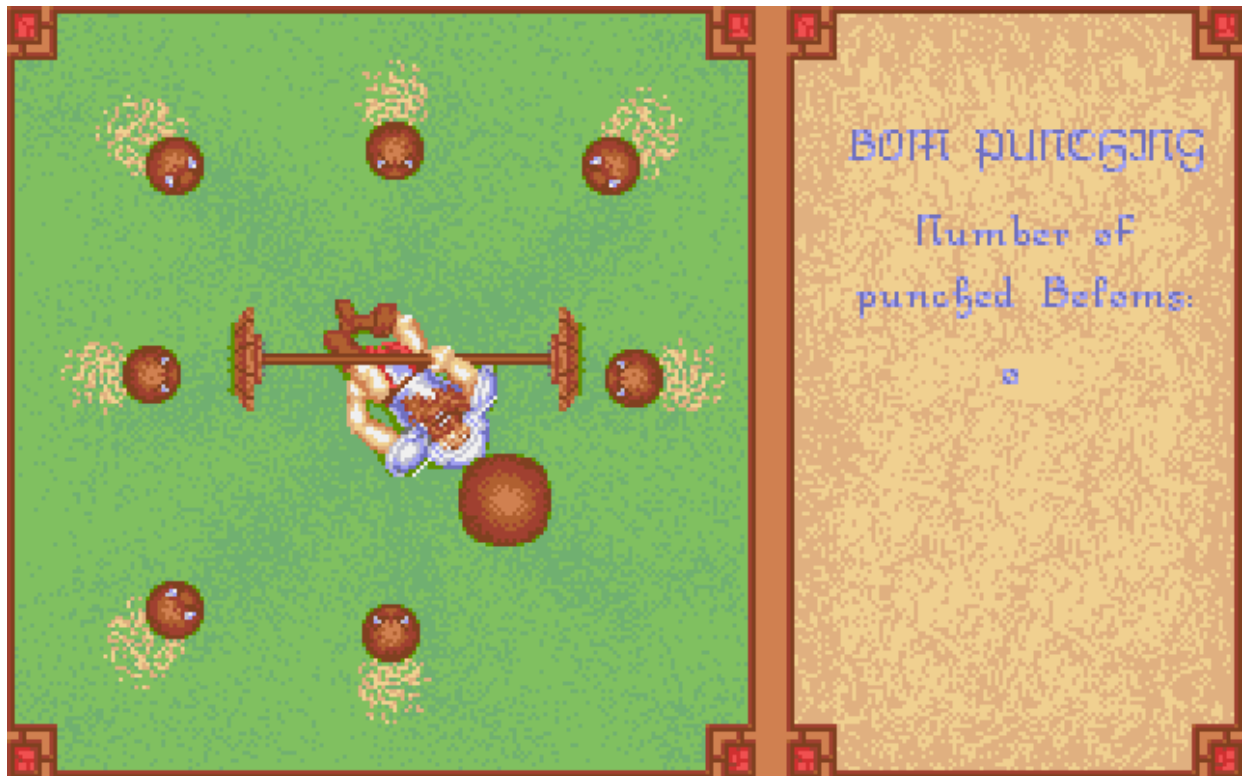


Unless you can guess its trajectory and catch it, three extra Beloms are added to your stash. There's no skill involved in this whatsoever; you pick a direction (or remain stationary in the centre) and then just hope it's the right choice. You have a one in three chance so the odds aren't *too* stacked against you. Catch the sacrificial quacker and your opponent is handicapped with the additional Beloms instead.

Once you've shifted all your Beloms you leg it across the pitch to secure your home run and points, and pray nothing hits you en route. All being well, we then segue into one of two bonus stages before proceeding to the next combatant.

There's an overhead-view 'Belom fending off session', tackled, tooled up with a feudal 'shove off' stick. How very English darling. You're approached by the excitable little clique one loveable rogue at a time who only wants to tickle you... until you suffocate to death presumably. Awww... that's

sweet. Your score is retained if you manage to deflect a predetermined number of Beloms before being swamped.



Then there's the 'boot the Belom into the mouths of the Faultons' shindig. All these events have official titles... refer back to my point about glossing over the manual. I'd go back and check except very little of the meticulously constructed fiction actually has a bearing on the gameplay so it's hardly worth the trouble. Unless you intend to check out Hartwig's black and white sketches that accompany the text; like the in-game artwork, they're sufficiently captivating to make you take time out to fully appreciate them.

Where were we? Faultons. These lizard-esque creatures perch on top of stone podiums snapping their eager jaws like scaley Hungry Hippos as you attempt to feed them with live delicacies. Curiously the overzealous and gleefully suicidal Beloms line up voluntarily in order to take part.



As well as the tournament mode, both events can be selected as practice sessions from the main menu, allowing you to perfect your aim for the real deal. Quite handy seeing as the controls can be a tad tricky to get a handle on despite being logical and simple enough.

You hold down the fire button for variable lengths of time to determine the strength/height of your kick, then release it when ready. Similarly, to aim, a degree of swerve can be applied by pushing left or right. A ground shot is achieved via a quick tap of the fire button, which comes in handy when you need to target gaps in the fences that crop up in later levels. It's also a good way to avoid penalty situations.

You *could* of course just haphazardly launch your Beloms *over* the wall and not worry about precision aiming. Though since you'll see so little variety in Grand Monster Slam you may as well be grateful for small mercies and embrace it. You don't even get to switch pitch sides for a change of scenery.

This, of course, means you'll be deprived the privilege of appreciating the bounteous dwarfage of your sprite to its fullest.



Arguably a bigger drawback is the lack of a human two-player versus mode, which would have enhanced Monster Slam's appeal tremendously. Of course, losing to the computer and becoming the king's designated fool for a year pales into insignificance in the shadow of a dig in the shoulder and a mocking 'ha-ha' from the guy sitting beside you.

By way of compensation, Rainbow Arts *did* at least include a couple of complimentary tin goblin soldiers with the package, courtesy of Hobby Products GmbH. I didn't realise this until about twenty years later because my copy was part of a bare basics 'Astra Pack'; a collection of 10 budget titles distributed in audio cassette boxes in 1991. It also included Datastorm, Dungeon Quest, E-Motion, Kid Gloves, Powerplay - The Game Of The Gods, RVF Honda, Shufflepuck Cafe, MicroProse Soccer and Tower of Babel. This was compiled to be bundled with Amigas sold by Silica UK, though must have been sold separately elsewhere too because my first Amiga came from Diamond Computers in Stockport.

I think the point I'm very slowly building up to is that because it cost peanuts I wasn't overly disappointed by the supremely shallow gameplay on offer. On the contrary, I

appreciated the rapid-fire, fun diversion in short bursts as a prelude to diving into something meatier. Like Croak. At the original, *premium* asking price I doubt I would have been quite so generous.

